

LutheranWoman

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

This month we are sharing some of the letters received (by the editors or by the current Bible study author, Robin Mattison) about the *LWT* Bible study. Some folks are enjoying the study, benefiting from its challenging and interesting insights. Others may prefer some studies that have been presented in the past. Thanks to all for your comments.

We want to emphasize that each nine-session Bible study (September–May) is accompanied by a separate Leader Guide that provides helpful information not included in the participants' material. We strongly encourage all Bible study groups to use the Leader Guide. If you would like to obtain the Leader Guide or the Companion Bible for the 2003–2004 study, please call 800-328-4648 (see p. 51).

Peace and blessings to all,

Nancy Goldberger, editor

Letters—All about the Bible study!

I was so happy to read the article on Bible studies in nursing homes (“Circles of Life: Bible Study Fosters Connectedness,” September 2003). I, too, lead a Bible study in one of our local nursing homes. I liked the concept of coming together in a circle (we have always sat at a table, which means I can't have good eye contact with everyone). I try to use our current study from *LWT* when I can make it applicable.

I, too, have a 95-year-old participant in our study. She cracks me up with her astute answers—sometimes in English and sometimes in German—and I always come away feeling I have received more than I gave. Thank you.

Artis Kjar, Trinity Lutheran Church—Lisbon, N.D.

Dr. Mattison:

Thank you for your Bible study in the September 2003 issue of *LWT*. I learned more about the heritage

of Lutheranism through the points that you make in the Bible study.

After being raised as a child in the ELCA, I sensed a calling as a teenager to be eventually ordained in the ELCA. Now, at age 29, I am working toward that goal. I have a real passion for the many needs, spiritual, physical, and otherwise, of the people in rural North Dakota.

The charismatic faith of Paul was something that I assumed people understood but didn't necessarily recognize. After talking with my dad (an ordained pastor in the ELCA), I was enlightened to better understand the three legs of the Lutheran theological stool that we stand upon. We often forget the charismatic nature of Paul's experience.

I believe that your Bible study is a piece of a large puzzle. It's a tool that God can use to help us grow in our faith. Thank you.

Sarah Isaacson—Verona, N.D.



GIVE US THIS DAY

A New Command

by Marj Leegard

SOMETHING NEW! A NEW YEAR IS NEW. WE HAVE HARDLY LEARNED TO WRITE 2000 AND NOT 19-SOMETHING, AND ALREADY IT IS 2004. *NEW* IS A LOVELY WORD. It smells of leather and rustles like taffeta. New shoes pinch our toes and give us a stiff clumping walk, but they do shine.

I recall a childhood celebration. I was dressed in new from the skin to the outside. "Don't spill!" "Be careful where you sit!" "Don't scuff your toes!" were the stern instructions I kept hearing. Even my hair had a new crimp on the ends of my bangs, and I smelled a little burnt. The relatives, food, and holiday all took second place to my glorious raiment.

When Jesus was speaking to his disciples after Judas left to betray him, he also used this common word, *new*: "But I am giving you a new command. You must love each other, just as I have loved you" (John 14:34, Contemporary English Version). He gets our attention. This new teaching is not a command we would have chosen. We would have found an easier one, something that we had already adopted as our way of life.

Love each other? All the time? Everyone? I can love this one and that one and some of those over there, but not all of them and certainly not all the time. Certainly not in the way that Jesus loves me.

One January long ago, the road was high with snowdrifts. It was Idella's birthday. Doris called and said they would come by with the horses and sleigh and pick us up so that we could all surprise Idella.

We snuggled into the straw and covered the kids with blankets. The harness bells and the horses' hooves on the hard snow and the bright stars overhead were perfect. Doris said, "I used my mixer for the first time. I made divinity. Oh, dear, where is it?" She had carefully packed the candies in a single layer in a flat box and covered them with waxed paper—and we were sitting on it. The lovely little mountains of white with a curl on top were now flat patties pressed between layers of waxed paper. Loving everyone begins with all the curlicues and embellishments of the heart, but life moves our love into the hard places. The places of loss and hurt and pain.

The end of my day of loving everyone as Jesus loves me is often confusion—the intended sweetness gets mashed together with bits of straw. I understand why Simon Peter wants to change the subject. That's what I want to do! Let me build a monument to the commandments I want others to observe. Let me check off the ones I am able to obey, but don't expect me to love other people. How could I allow them to die hungry if I loved them? How could I not temper punishment with pity if I loved them?

This new command is not only a choice, not only a new way of life. It is our *identity*. Jesus says that everyone will know who his disciples are. Are you wearing something new?

LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

Women as . Companions

SEX IN THE CITY SINGLES VERSUS SOCCER MOMS.

Which audience to aim for? This is just the most recent way women have been set in opposition to each other: as targets of campaign advertising dollars. But the headlines don't even mention the large number of older women who vote faithfully. **by Norma Cook Everist**

And then there's that old Irving Berlin song, "Sisters": "Lord help the mister who comes between me and my sister, and Lord help the sister who comes between me and my man."

Too often women have been divided from each other. News interviews look for the points of antagonism: "You stayed at home to raise your children; don't you think the career woman should do the same?" Magazines objectify: Models wear designer clothes, but the rest of us can

only dream. We classify: "If we could just convince those young women to come to the meeting." And, yes, we are sometimes divided in the competition for men: "Lord help the sister."

Even though women bond, society puts us into categories: single or married; old or young; pretty or plain; childbearing or barren; clergywoman or laywoman; lesbian or straight; rich or poor; fat or thin; good or bad; working or non-working (whatever that means—all women work!). Such descriptions

tempt us to allow ourselves to be divided from other women, to be competitive, or to exclude each other in shame or blame.

We are different from one another, but do we need to compete? Women, in our differences, may instead accompany one another on the journey of faith and life. And that companionship makes for a wonderful journey!

Biblical pairings of women: Mary and Martha, Rachel and Leah, Sarah and Hagar, harlot and virgin. Women in Scripture frequently appear in pairs, and their stories often are set against one another.

Consider 1 Samuel 1:1–2:10. How strange that the story of two women begins not with them but with "There was a certain man . . ." The text—and the husband—divides the women: "the name of



the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children" (1:2). No wonder the women became rivals; their worth was defined by their differences.

We remember Esther being called "at such a time as this" not to keep silent but to speak up for deliverance for her people (Esther 4:9–17). But do we remember the beginning of the story in Esther 1 and the courage of Vashti, the queen she replaced? Vashti's refusal to be objectified, to be paraded before the king, cost her her life. So threatened were the king's male sages at the thought that "this deed of the queen will be made known to all women," causing no end of trouble, that they urged the king to "give her royal position to another who is better than she" (1:17, 19).

And why do so many sermons on Luke 10:38–42 miss the central point for all of us—how easily we are distracted from the Word, Christ, through worry about many things—by focusing on separating Mary and Martha into good woman or bad woman? Both wanted to serve their friend Jesus. Note that in the account of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–44), it is Martha who goes out to meet Jesus while Mary stays at home (v. 20).

But in contrast to the ways women are set against each other, the story of God coming to live among us begins with these words: "In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God . . ." Sixth month of what? Luke 1:26 does not refer to a calendar month or even to the reign of a mighty ruler. Remember verse 24? "After those days . . . Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion." Then comes verse 26, "In the sixth month . . ." The incarnation of Christ is marked by the connection of two women's pregnancies.

Right after Mary believingly responds, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word," she sets out with haste to serve the older Elizabeth (Luke 1:38–40). We learn in verse 56 that Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months before returning to her home.

For reflection

Women have worked, laughed, cried, and prayed together in kitchens and around conference tables, seeking to "get things done" in nonhierarchical, non-competitive ways.

- How have you experienced women working together positively?

- What painful divisions have you experienced?
- Has using your gifts ever seemed to threaten other women or men? In what way?
- What comments have you received that set you against other women?

The changing roles of women and men in society and in the church have brought new possibilities for partnerships but also renewed potential for misunderstanding. Women working together can be seen by others as threatening. I have noticed, for example, that often when a small group of female clergy talk together in a room full of male clergy, one of the men will approach us and jokingly say, "We'll have to break this up." But the joke falls flat; we don't want to be "broken up." Others need not feel threatened when faithful people gather for support and encouragement, no matter what the composition of the group.

We are called to be faithful to God in being who we are through *using* our gifts, not *hiding* them. We are created for interdependence to support and encourage our sisters' service to God.

- Think about women with whom you have been compared or with whom you have been tempted to compete. How might you support one another?

- Think about some barriers to strong, positive relationships with women. What are some specific things you might do to build understanding and trust?
- Think about a specific woman who looks unlike you or whose life choices have been very different from your own. What do you have in common?

The women in your life

As you picture your women companions, I will share details about some of mine.

Linda and I sat on the steps of her house in Detroit on 30th Street. I lived on 28th. She is African-American and a Baptist, and I, Euro-American and a Lutheran. We had waited through two pregnancies together. We met each Friday morning for Bible study. And then the 1967 riots came (rebellions, really, for they were a challenge to society's racism). We could have been divided by race, but we were determined that we would not be. In spite of our differences, we are so much alike. We have remained companions through crisis. She sang at my ordination in Connecticut years later. And years later still, she visited our Wartburg Seminary community in Dubuque. Last summer my husband and I traveled to Detroit to

visit Linda, a widow of two weeks. We cried and kissed. She quoted God's word in Jeremiah 31:3: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."

Louise and I could be divided by age. Though the 30 years' difference between us could separate us, we love to have tea and talk and talk and talk.

Edie and I could slide into society's division: single or married. But through the years, we have continued our friendship, though she lives in California and I in Iowa. I visit her home; she loves my kids.

Karen and I have an international friendship. Actually, there

are many special Karens in my life, but this one lives in Australia. Dear, gentle Karen. I wish we lived closer, but close we are, nonetheless.

Karna and I, college roommates, are now separated not only by miles but by stage of life. She talks excitedly about retirement travels, and I talk excitedly about teaching.

And then, of course, I think of my biological sister, Marianne, who has known me in every chapter of my life. What a precious gift she is to me!

Companions in difficulty
All is not warm and wonderful in women's lives. Three women

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together from the tomb
seeking life, not death.
They seek to witness
boldly and to serve in
powerful ways.

traveled home from an out-of-town women's gathering. It took five hours. They had known each other for years but had not talked like this before. Beneath a calm exterior each was dealing with difficulties at home, only hinted at before. Even they were surprised at the extent of their problems and the depth of their sharing. Two were married to men with alcohol problems, and one had an abusive husband. What they had in common was the task of coping with work, children, church—being “responsible.” They could not tell each other what to do. Nor did they wish to compare: “I have it worse than you.” They could listen to each other in their differences. (The women with alcoholic husbands lived in different situations and eventually went in different directions in their marriages.) They connected at a deep level, sharing Christ and finding the strength to make the necessary decisions.

Companions with Christ

Women are called to companionship with each other through companionship in Christ. ELCA companion synods connect vastly different parts of the global church, but not in a one-up/one-down relationship, nor even as giver and receiver, which, when the giving

always goes in one direction, can become one always up and one always down. Companionship across economic differences leads us to challenge unjust systems like the globalization of consumer capitalism, which is being built on the lowest-paid labor of women in developing countries, keeping them perpetually poor. No matter how much society compels us to compete and destroy, women of God meet each other in forgiveness for new life.

Women's companionship has often had to be private, or, if public, kept quiet, lest women's witness and powerful work threaten the powers that be. Read Luke 23 and 24. The resurrection account begins in Luke 24 with “they came to the tomb.” But who are “they”? They are the women who had stood at a distance; they had been there together all along! They had seen Jesus led to the cross. “A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women” (Luke 23:27). They had stayed at the crucifixion when the mere spectators left: “But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things” (v. 49). They had stayed to serve: “The women who had come with him from Galilee followed [the mention

of their longtime discipleship is repeated, lest we miss it], and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.” And then they had rested (vss. 55–56).

Now we know who these women companions are—but we do not hear their names. *They* got up at dawn. *They* came to the tomb. *They* found the stone rolled away. And, yes, *they* were perplexed and terrified and heard the question “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5). When the women give witness to what they had remembered, seen, and heard, they are finally named together: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others.

And, together, they found that their words were dismissed. They were not believed.

Women today walk together from the tomb seeking life, not death. They seek to witness boldly and to serve in powerful ways, as companions with the living Christ, companions of one another.

Norma Cook Everist is professor of church and ministry at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. She is a pastor, a deaconess, and a companion of many women.

HOW HAS YOUR CONNECTION WITH ANOTHER WOMAN HELPED YOU ON YOUR FAITH JOURNEY?

We didn't know Thea well when we invited her to join our small sharing group. She was newly widowed and as old as our mothers. Thea wondered how she would fit in, and so did we. As the weeks went by, we realized what a gift God had placed in our midst.

Through Thea's example we learned the important role prayer and Bible study should play in our lives. Besides praying for us and our families daily, she sent us encouraging notes with Scripture passages chosen just for us and our particular needs. As we struggled to raise our families, Thea shared her wisdom gained from years of Christian parenting. Our interest in world missions grew as we learned of her missionary daughter's work in Hong Kong.

Thea taught us that you never retire from God's work. As she approached 90, she moved into a retirement complex where she continued to share God's word and love with residents there. We saw the strength and peace that come from faith as we watched her struggle with health problems. Thea was 95 when she

went to her heavenly home, but she still lives in my heart and the hearts of so many whose faith journeys were blessed by her loving example of a Christ-filled life.

Lorna Reed—Friendswood, Tex.

Ibegan my friendship with Edith in a book study on prayer. We discovered more about each other in our weekly class and discussions than we had ever known just from worshiping in church together. I learned from her insights and strong faith. I also learned about her prayer journals—where she records her prayers and leaves room on the pages for the answers, proof of God's faithful promises.

I also learned from Edith's deep well of wisdom. She told me that when she or her husband would get impatient for an answer from God, they would ask each other, "Are your feet wet yet?"

She explained, "The Red Sea didn't part until Moses was at the edge of the water." I often think of that phrase "Are your feet wet yet?" when I'm growing anxious while waiting to discern God's plan. My own faith and trust and under-

standing of God have deepened, thanks to Edith's unswerving faith and prayer life.

Beth A. Palm—Rockford, Ill.

I was mentoring a docent for an organization that I volunteer with. My trainee had recently been widowed, and she thought that the docent work would help fill a hole in her life.

As a trainee, she was a mentor's dream, completing all the requirements and assignments promptly. Along the way, I began to see the depth of her love for her husband, her present grief, and the strength of her resolve to rebuild her life. Except on rare occasions, her stoicism did not invite any discussion of her experience or feelings, but I found myself praying for her: "Dear God, I bring before you my friend, who is mourning the loss of her husband. Please comfort and reassure her. Surround her with your compassion, that she may know your loving presence in her life. In Jesus' name, Amen." Now I give thanks to God for giving me a prayer to say for her, and for her growing strength.

Pat Oehler—Sacramento, Calif.

Overexposed?

by Dana Vance Colby

LAST SUMMER SOME FRIENDS AND I HAD A CONVERSATION THAT BOTHERED ME, AND I HAVE THOUGHT A LOT ABOUT IT SINCE. We were talking about our children's emotions, their responses to emotional situations, and our parental expectations of our little ones. At the time the country was in the grip of Harry Potter fever. (I myself am a fan of J. K. Rowling's popular series, but I do not think that the books are appropriate for young children. My two sons are under five years old, so I look forward to sharing the magical stories with them when they are older.)

In that conversation, two friends with young children mentioned that they were looking forward to the second movie in the Harry Potter series. I was surprised that they would let their children watch it, but neither felt it was a big deal, especially since their children had already seen the first movie two years before. That really took me aback—their children had seen the first movie at ages four and six. When I inquired further, one friend said that because her four-year-old hadn't understood much of it, it couldn't have harmed her. She also theorized that seeing the scary parts had desensitized her child so that she wasn't scared of anything anymore and never had nightmares. In fact, the children even laughed at some of the scary parts.

What concerned me was the idea that desensitizing young children is a good thing, that showing small children powerful images can't harm them if they can't understand them.

As parents, don't we want our children to have all the emotions God gave them? Don't we want

them to have appropriate emotional responses? When children see something sad, they should feel sad and seek our comfort. Why would we want little ones not to feel their real feelings? Why should we expect them to deal with mature issues when they are not mature people?

When my son was four, he was in the theater watching *VeggieTales* and *Piglet's Big Adventure*, and he loved them. Sadly, he was one of the oldest children there, and many of his preschool friends were bored by those movies, having already moved on to *Batman*, *Spiderman*, and *Scooby Doo*. I feel our children have a long time to be exposed to scary stuff. Shouldn't we allow them to live in the present of their childhood years? Why rush to show them such complex images? If a four-year-old has already seen a Harry Potter movie, what's going to hold his attention at age 10? Where does one draw the line?

I question how much we can trust the entertainment media to be our allies in helping our young charges learn to manage their emotions. Do we really want children to laugh at scary or sad things? My four-year-old is still afraid of things like imaginary monsters and the back of an ambulance. My two-year-old is afraid of loud motorcycles and big dogs—all age-appropriate fears. They come running to their father and me for comfort when they are confronted by scary things. They know they don't have to handle their fears alone.

One morning, a little boy who stays with us during the day was crying because he was missing his



mother. My two-year-old brought his blanket to help his friend feel better; he sat by him, patting him while he cried. This was a small act of kindness, and I was glad that my son responded to his friend's sadness with kindness.

Don't misunderstand—my boys are not all sweetness and light. They can be brutal with each other. We struggle constantly to get them to use words instead of hitting or pushing, and even then to control the meanness of their words. On many days, helping them get control of their emotions seems an impossibly tall order, but we keep trying. We try to tell them and show them that it is okay to be angry, but it is not acceptable to hit people or throw things or say mean things. I realize that these concerns will give way to larger ones in time. But for now, these are our concerns, and I think that's as it should be with young children.

It gets harder and harder to keep our children's world small and protected. I have a handful of like-minded friends who struggle as I do to shelter their little ones from violent or frightening media images,

who strive for peaceful sibling relations and insist on kind words. We try to support each other and reinforce similar rules when our children play together. I also know other parents who throw up their hands and figure that children will see "this stuff" eventually, so why bother trying to keep it out of the house?

Perhaps some will think my boys too naïve, too sheltered, but my husband and I are trying to set rules in our home that all of us can live with. I have to know in my heart that we have tried to make the best choices for them, to guide them until they are able to make their own decisions. It is my daily prayer that they will be equipped to love God, their neighbors, and themselves. Let us pray for all children that they may not become so desensitized that they lose this precious gift of childhood.

Dana Vance Colby, a junior high school teacher by profession, is taking time off from teaching to be a stay-at-home mom. She and her husband, Bill, live in Chicago with their two sons, Cameron and Patrick.

GIRLS NEED COMMUNITY

“Seven-year-old girls elbow their way to the front in science lab. When we study electricity, they push wires together to hear the crackle and see the sparks.” The teacher describing this is puzzled by a change he has seen over and over again. “But by high school, girls stand back. They watch as the boys do the experiments.”

“I tried out for the city ballet,” recalls a 17-year-old girl. “They sent me a sort of score card. I had high marks for dance, but on the card was written, ‘body defects.’ I wasn’t thin enough. Is that a defect?”

“We took a long look at our creative, God-filled, exuberant nine-year-old daughters,” say two concerned mothers. “What can we do to protect our girls from a world that can leave them hollow-eyed and betrayed?”

Teachers, parents, and girls

themselves feel uneasy when they look honestly at what happens to many girls during adolescence. What transforms a quick, eager 10-year-old girl into a timid young woman of 16, drained of confidence and curiosity? What makes high school girls hate their bodies—one harming her health with obesity, another with anorexia? What circumstances lead to a junior-high girl’s becoming pregnant? Why does school life for many girls include sexual harassment? What squelches girls’ passion for learning? And how, we women ask, can we make a difference?

A THREATENING WORLD

Current research points to aspects of the environment that are damaging to adolescent girls. Clinical psychologist Mary Pipher explains in *Reviving Ophelia* that

girls today face an increasingly “dangerous, sexualized, and media-saturated world.” It begins early. Girls read teen magazines with articles titled “You’re Hot!” and “10 Shocking Things Guys Wish Girls Knew.” Music videos feature suggestively dressed young female singers as willing victims of aggressive sexual advances. Movies pitched to high school students display violence against women and sex without love or consequences.

Amid the noise of these external voices, an adolescent girl is experiencing complex physical and psychological changes within. Though she needs her mother’s guidance more than ever, she is necessarily pulling away, forming her own view of herself and the world around her. Her father may be mystified by his mercurial daughter or absent. Friends her

own age, insecure themselves, are allies one day and adversaries the next. Adolescence can be a troubled, lonely walk.

So how can we help? For girls who are struggling to stay emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy, a supportive community of Christian women can be life-giving. Women can promote discussions of topics that are important to girls. In our church libraries, we must include girl-affirming selections, such as the novels in Ann Rinaldi's *Quilt Trilogy* and the 2003 film *Whale Rider*.¹ Our language for people and for God needs to include the feminine as well as the masculine. Girls looking around at church should find women in leadership during worship, on the church council, at church meetings, and in the pulpit. We must encourage the emerging leadership of our girls in all aspects of church worship and service. Moreover, as members of women's groups, we can plan gatherings and circles specifically designed to nurture girls and young women.

A HAVEN FOR GROWTH AND EXPLORATION

For five summers on Whidbey Island in Washington state, an ecumenical group of women writers created retreats for girls and

their mothers or mentors. These retreats, designed especially for girls of 11 or 12, also included girls as old as 18. For three days and nights, we shared stories about girls and women—from the Bible, from folktales, from our own experience. We looked at Scripture and nature through women's eyes. We sang, danced, and walked along the shore; we stitched pouches and made masks. Together we created worship and blessing ceremonies. Mothers practiced the art of holding each daughter in love while releasing her to her inner guidance by the Holy Spirit. Each girl, invited to contribute as an equal, entered into a loving circle of supportive Christian women. Wisdom and joy passed from women to girls and back, lending girls inner strength when making decisions, as they later told us. Beloved daughters of God, created in the image of God, claimed their authentic selves.

Daughters Arise! A Christian Retreat Resource for Girls Approaching Womanhood (Pilgrim Press, 2002) grew out of the experience of these gatherings. This guidebook is filled with programs and practical details to assist women in creating their own retreats for their daughters and other girls they care about.

In a world where girls can be defined by demeaning voices, a loving community can instill in each one the certainty of the value of her own unique being. Supported and secure, she is able to listen to the still, small voice within. Women, indeed, have the power to surround each girl with God's grace and to lift her up, so that she can reach as high as her abilities and talents will take her.

Gloria Reinertson Koll lives with her husband, William, on Whidbey Island, Wash., where they attend Trinity Lutheran Church. With Donna Humphreys and Sally Windecker, she co-authored *Daughters Arise! A Christian Retreat Resource for Girls Approaching Womanhood and the accompanying Daughters Arise! Journal*, both available from Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio.

NOTE

1. The opening examples and book and film recommendations come from conversations with teachers, mothers, and girls. Ann Rinaldi's *Quilt Trilogy* contains *A Stitch in Time*, *Broken Days*, and *The Blue Door* (New York: Scholastic). The film *Whale Rider* tells the story of a girl in the Maori culture of New Zealand who becomes a great leader. For further reading, I recommend Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Putnam, 1994. Reprint, New York: Ballantine, 2002). I would also like to offer my special thanks to Bess Windecker Nelson, Ph.D. (childhood development), for her supportive research.



LUTHERAN LIBERIAN WOMEN UNIFY FOR PEACE

by Eva Jensen

FOR OVER 15 YEARS, the crisis in Liberia has been growing worse. Warring government factions and rebel forces in Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) created unrest, displacing people from their homes and virtually eliminating Liberian citizens' access to basics for survival—food, clean water, and health care.

In the past two years, the situation had become increasingly dangerous. Phebe Hospital, which was founded in 1921 by

Lutheran missionaries and serves the 500,000 residents and 80,000–100,000 displaced persons in Bong County, was closed in March 2003. The staff and patients were evacuated in the face of an attack by advancing rebel forces. ELCA mission personnel who serve at Phebe Hospital had returned to the United States because of the expanding civil war. The very next month, the Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) invited Lutheran partners in Europe and North America to their annual “partner meeting.” Was it wise to go? Would the

Liberians even be able to meet with us?

As program director for West Africa in the ELCA Division for Global Mission, I called Bette McCrandall, the long-term ELCA missionary serving with the Lutheran Church in Liberia, to discuss the situation. “Oh, yes, the situation is difficult. But the ministry of the church continues. And we also have new hope: The women are marching for peace! The women have met with the leaders of the rebel movement. They are seeking a meeting with President Charles Taylor. So far,

he has refused, so they are marching to the government buildings to insist on a meeting. They are organized as the Women in Peace-building Network (WIPNET) Liberia.”

WOMEN’S ORGANIZING BRINGS NEW HOPE

Leymah Gbowee, president of the women’s organization at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in the capital city of Monrovia, and Comfort Freeman, president of the National Lutheran Church Women in Liberia, began organizing WIPNET Liberia in June 2002. In their daily life and work, Gbowee and Freeman recognize the reality that Liberia’s people—individually and collectively—have been traumatized by war.

“By virtue of where we sit, the people of Liberia have hope,” said Gbowee, referring to the women who began their daily sit-in for peace in mid-April on the Monrovia Airfield next to the main road leading into the city. Under the hot sun and in pouring rain, the women of Liberia gathered to convey their commitment to peace. They gathered to protest the actions of all who perpetuate Liberia’s violent civil war. “Some say we are an embarrassment to the government,” Gbowee continued, “but sun and rain are better

than the bullets of war. Our vision is for the unity of families and the elimination of hunger and disease. We believe God’s hands are under us in this effort now. God has turned ears toward us.”

The recurring violence in the country and the repeated displacement of tens of thousands of women and children are central concerns of the women of the LCL. They decided that they cannot accept violence and suffering as a long-term situation for themselves, their children, or their nation. With Freeman’s leadership, the women of the LCL convened a meeting of women from other churches, and together they agreed that it was time to rise up and speak.

In July 2002, the women broadened their network, supporting the participation of Muslim women in the peace initiative. By December 2002, the Muslim women had organized. In the spring of 2003, Christian and Muslim women agreed to work together in a peace-building network. On April 11, 2003, over 3,000 women gathered for the launch of WIPNET.

WOMEN IN ACTION

With determination to end the violence, the women began their action with a confession included

in the statement they distributed: “In the past we were silent, but after being killed, raped, dehumanized, and infected with diseases, and watching our children and families destroyed, war has taught us that the future lies in saying NO to violence and YES to peace! We will not relent until peace prevails.”

For more than a month after the launch of WIPNET Liberia, the women held mass meetings at Monrovia City Hall and the capitol building. They marched in the streets for peace, they held peace vigils in mosques and churches, they met with women in the refugee camps, and they held public sit-ins for peace every day. Everywhere, more women determined to be agents of peacemaking.

On the first day of their sit-in, Gbowee reports, “The president ordered armed men to come with rattans to whip them, for they feared women would march to the home of the president.” The women proudly wore tee shirts that proclaimed “We Want Peace. No More War.” Initially, President Taylor refused to meet with the women, but when the power of their movement became evident, he invited them to a meeting. Dressed in sackcloth and ashes to convey their grief for the nation, the women presented their call

for a cease-fire and for good-faith negotiations for peace. They refused chairs and protocols of honor, choosing to sit on the floor as a sign of their solidarity with the people. When the president offered them \$5,000, they refused it, declaring, "Money cannot buy peace!"

At the LCL partner meeting, Liberians said, "We have new hope because of the action of the women!" Freeman reported that men and women, including soldiers and government employees, stopped at the airfield sit-in to thank the women for their witness and to give them water, food, and money to support their efforts.

WIPNET Liberia had an official observer at the Liberia peace talks in Ghana. As the negotiations wore on, groups of women in Liberia and Ghana continued their sit-in witness for peace. Violence in Liberia increased during the final days of the negotiations, but a plan for peace and new governance in Liberia was established. International commitments were made to send and support peacekeeping forces.

Gbowee of WIPNET says, "Women will always be present with whatever government comes. Hope for the future depends on the government taking decisions

in consultation with the citizens. When the cease-fire is implemented and the peacekeepers arrive, our sit-in will stop. We will watch closely whatever follows. The women of Liberia are determining the future of Liberia now!" Where violence and conflict have persisted, WIPNET has been present to document violations of the peace agreement and intervene with actions for peace and reconciliation.

CALL FOR SOLIDARITY, PRAYER, AND ADVOCACY

As women of the ELCA, we receive this gift of faith from our sisters in Liberia. I asked Leymah Gbowee, "How can we in the ELCA accompany you? What can Women of the ELCA do in solidarity with the women of Liberia?" She responded, "Remember us in prayer. Advocate for international support in our peace effort." Comfort Freeman

asked us to pray for peace and plead with our government to send peacekeeping troops, finance international United Nations peacekeepers, support the peace process, and contribute to reconstruction.

The Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) has created a Web site that includes reports on the situation in Liberia and a guide to advocacy efforts supporting the Liberian peace plan (www.loga.org/Africa/Liberia.htm). You may also support the ministries of the Lutheran Church in Liberia. Write to the ELCA Division for Global Mission, c/o Rev. David Lerseth, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631; or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2641, for more information. You may also support the Lutheran Disaster Response in Liberia with a gift to the ELCA International Disaster Response. Call 800-638-3522 or visit elca.org/disaster/howtogive.html for more information.

Rev. Dr. Eva Jensen is the program director for West Africa in the ELCA's Division for Global Mission. She is responsible for the ELCA's relationships with churches, programs, and mission personnel in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

WHAT INTERGENERATIONAL EVENTS OR ACTIVITIES DOES YOUR GROUP HOLD?

Our circle hosted a grandmother-granddaughter Angel Christmas Tea the first Sunday afternoon in December for “angels” ages 3 to 10 and their grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Guests were greeted with angel nametags, and photos were taken of each granddaughter-grandmother pair (and mailed to them later). The room and tables were decorated with angels and holiday greenery. Coffee, tea, punch, angel food cake, and angel-shaped cookies were served. Each guest decorated an angel cookie and made an angel tree ornament to be taken home. A story about an angel was read, and each girl was given a small angel-print pillow for a doll or for hanging on her bedroom doorknob. Three generations of various faiths from our small community enjoyed this delightful event.

Sharon Spicher—Hingham, Mont.

Hingham Lutheran Church

Our women’s organization sponsored a Family Night on a Sunday evening in February. Instead of the usual talent show, we held a carnival for young and old. Games and entertainment were held for all, including a tumbling team, a mime group from the local high school, and a group of young dancers.

We set out a sign-up sheet on Sunday mornings so that the food committee would know how many to serve. In order to promote the event to all ages, small flyers advertising the event were also sent home with preschoolers to spark interest. One of the entertainment committee members dressed up as a

clown and went around to all the Sunday school rooms. That extra bit of effort made what could have been a rather small event into a large success.

Charlotte Thiesse—Armstrong, Iowa

Nazareth Lutheran Church

Our women’s group held a wonderful gathering called “What Mama Always Told Me.” It featured three women from different generations relating what their mothers had taught them. This brunch was held the weekend before Mother’s Day. We collected a free-will offering to cover expenses and to purchase Mother’s Day gifts for women at the local shelter for battered women.

Robin Kieffer—Eagan, Minn.

Easter Lutheran Church

The women of Normandale Lutheran Church hold two intergenerational activities, among others, that are exceptional. The first is a golf outing held in mid-September. Non-golfers participate in special activities at the clubhouse, and everyone meets together for a buffet luncheon followed by a speaker.

The second well-attended event is our Christmas tea. Each of the coordinators decorates a holiday table for eight people, setting the table with her own china, glassware, and linens and contributing a dessert as well. This year a humorous author will be our guest speaker.

Vicki Brunsvold—Edina, Minn.

president, Normandale Lutheran Women of the ELCA



FIRST SLICE

Hot Food and Cool Ideas

by Viviana Ramirez

THE FIRST SLICE OF PIE, THE FIRST SLICE OF BREAD—THESE PHRASES BRING TO MIND HEAVENLY SMELLING TREATS FRESH FROM THE OVEN. THE FIRST SLICE OFTEN GOES TO A SPECIAL PERSON, PERHAPS THE GUEST OF HONOR. IN A COMMUNITY IN THE HEART OF AN URBAN AREA, ONE WOMAN HAD A VISION. IT INVOLVED SHARING THE FIRST SLICE—AND CREATING A STRONGER COMMUNITY IN THE PROCESS. SHE SHARED HER VISION WITH WOMEN OF THE ELCA IN THE FORM OF A GRANT PROPOSAL. THE GRANT COMMITTEE APPROVED THE PROPOSAL AND PROVIDED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO HELP SUPPORT THE PROGRAM. THIS EXCITING MINISTRY IS AN EXAMPLE OF YOUR GIFTS AT WORK.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Mary Ellen Diaz, a successful professional chef, sought to use her cooking skills and talents to do more than cater to those who could afford to dine at upscale restaurants. She is a woman of faith who wanted to make a difference. Diaz belongs to Ebenezer Lutheran Church, an ELCA church in her neighborhood. As her idea took shape, she incorporated activities that were important to her: creating delicious, healthful food; developing community; sharing God-given gifts. Her dream was to use her church's kitchen as a place of outreach

where people from all walks of life would come together to prepare food side by side and share the resulting meals with each other and beyond. First Slice is a unique program through which volunteers and recipients both give and receive, and also grow richer by benefit of their relationship with each other.

First Slice operates out of Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Andersonville, a bustling Chicago neighborhood that has seen rapid growth in the past decade. Among the flourishing businesses and fashionable young professionals, however, many unemployed and underemployed people struggle

to get by. Diaz saw the gap between those who have and those who have not as an ever-widening crevasse. She knew that those without the means to stay in decent housing and obtain a healthful diet and regular health care would be left behind. Wanting to be an agent for positive change, Diaz created First Slice.

THE INGREDIENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

One of the goals of the First Slice program is to develop within each participant the capacity to serve and give back to the community. Diaz and her fellow organizers know that food is only part of the story.

They have outlined the goals of First Slice in this way: “As program participants collaboratively prepare community meals, friendships result and potential relationship barriers such as race, economic background, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious background are overcome. Most importantly, participants learn, firsthand, the value of serving one another and giving back to their community. We view all people in our program as assets rather than objects of need. It is our philosophy to recognize and affirm the gifts of all.”

Program organizers also seek to “provide wholesome, nutritious, community-prepared meals for all people regardless of their economic background.” An integral part of the First Slice program is education as a part of outreach. “We keep before us the ever-present need to help others learn about the issues of domestic hunger and food insecurity and the populations affected by these issues.”

WHO’S INVOLVED?

Two groups of participants are involved in the food preparation: shareholders and scholarship recipients. Shareholders are community members who pay to participate in the program. The “first slice”

of their financial commitment funds the same high-quality meals for the families in need (eliminating the financial expense for those families, the scholarship recipients). In 2003, 65 shareholder families were involved in the program.

Since the program’s inception, a variety of people—including lawyers, doctors, real-estate agents, architects—have been involved as shareholders. A unique aspect of the program is that those commonly viewed as “the haves” (the shareholders) often walk out the door with new skills learned from the “have-nots” (the scholarship recipients). Some participants experience a paradigm shift when those they initially viewed as the ones in need turn out to be the ones with the most to share!

Participants in First Slice meet in the church kitchen, but their experience doesn’t end when they walk out the door. Many scholarship recipients turn around and give back to the community. They share their stories and their experiences with those who may have previously seen hunger only as a statistic. Those who have experienced hunger put a face on a problem that our society has ignored, even unwittingly fostered. Knowledge is critical to ending hunger, and sharing that knowledge, educating the community, can bring about change.

SECOND HELPINGS

And the program doesn’t stop there. Because of its success, First Slice has been able to expand its outreach and support other community-related programs. Every Tuesday night, First Slice participants prepare vegetarian meals for 60 homeless or hungry guests in a restaurant-style setting (complete with wait staff) at Dignity Diner, located at a neighboring Methodist church. They also prepare meals for Horizons, a local youth community program, serving approximately 30 teens each week.

These cooperative efforts among participants, churches, and communities set a wonderful example of caring for all God's children, sharing the first slice with those who may never have had any of the pie before.

MAY I BORROW YOUR RECIPE?

First Slice can serve as a model for other programs. Are there individuals and families in your congregation, neighborhood, or city who might benefit from such a program? Consider this example of success related in the First Slice grant proposal. Bonnie* was working hard to make a better life for herself. Years of domestic abuse had left her with many scars—physical and emotional. She had been homeless. Her self-esteem was almost non-existent. After she began volunteering at First Slice, everyone noticed changes. Her appearance improved. Her attitude and outlook grew brighter every time she stepped into the kitchen. Over a few months her skills grew, and her responsibilities increased.

As more time passed, Bonnie developed a passion for making great pies, and now her pies are the program's signature dessert. While working in the kitchen, she met Ruth, a member of Ebenezer. Working side by side, the two became friends. Ruth invited Bonnie to worship. Bonnie now attends regularly and has become a part of the congregation's life. Bonnie and Ruth now feast together at the Lord's table.

What a wonderful outpouring of Christ's hospitality, with food and fellowship in abundance for all!

Viviana Ramirez is a Chicago native who enjoys learning about her city and its people.

*Names of participants have been changed.

PLEASE NOTE: We cannot accept contributions to this project because it is independent from Women of the ELCA. If you would like to support other projects that empower women around the world and help create stronger communities, contact Doris Strieter, associate for programs, at 800-638-3522, ext. 2465, for information on the Women of the ELCA Grants Program. Your financial support can make a positive difference in so many lives. Consider calling today.

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SERVING HOT TOPICS ON THE INTERNET

by Ceciley Boykin



CAFÉ, A NEW ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE (E-ZINE) from Women of the ELCA, was launched in August 2003 with extraordinary success. *Café*—which stands for Community, Advocacy, Faith, and Enlightenment—opened with a bang: More than 1,000 subscribers had signed up by the second issue. The e-zine was developed with an audience of women ages 20–35 in mind, but it has garnered interest from female and male readers of all ages.

Five issues are slated for each year. This year's topics are fair-trade chocolate, balance in life, a Christian financial perspective, care of the environment, and sex. Authors for *Café* are younger women who are passionate about issues that affect their lives and their communities. They each offer unique thoughts and perspectives to the topics they address.

Many readers of *Café* have expressed gratitude for the new publication and excitement about its coverage of issues affecting the world today. They are also grateful for the inspiration it provides for their daily lives as Christians. The premiere issue focused on chocolate and fair-trade practices. Author Karen Rupprecht, who helped run a fair-trade coffee campaign on her college campus, exposed the “big-name” chocolate corporations’ lack of support for fair trade.

Café's motto—Stirring the Spirit Within—is carried out through captivating articles, additional Web links, and suggestions of ways that subscribers can take action and get involved. *Café* further empowers its readers with a section called the Tip Jar. Here readers are encouraged to add their own two cents—sharing comments, thoughts, and suggestions with others.

In the second issue, Megan Jones, a pastor in Atlanta, explores the practice of Christian yoga. “Why is yoga, which has been around for over 5,000 years, gaining popularity now? Because the time is right: There is a spiritual restlessness in our country, along with an openness to exploration, a willingness to learn, and a deep desire to connect with God through meaningful rituals and relevant experience.” Jones is serving her first call as mission developer for SoulQuest, an outreach ministry to the unchurched. Learn more about her personal journey in the *Café* issue on the topic of balance in life.

Read about ways to achieve balance in your life in this issue of *Café*. To receive future issues the day they are released, subscribe at www.elca.org/wo/cafe. You won't want to miss an issue!

Ceciley Boykin is a communication specialist with Women of the ELCA.



Editor's note: Sometimes we miss something extraordinary when it is right before us. Perhaps it's a beautiful sunset when we have our attention focused on an indoor task, or the song of a bird when we are busy running errands. When *LWT* received Michael Troutman's reflection on his springtime visit to a small Lutheran church in Pennsylvania, we knew we had to share it with our readers. His account beautifully illustrates the truth that our actions in community have an impact not just on our own lives but on the lives of all who are touched by them, even in passing.

REFLECTION ON A SUNDAY MORNING

by Michael L. Troutman

Every once in a while I hear comments that the ELCA has too many small congregations. Whether or not this is true, a recent worship experience I had reminds me that the Spirit is very much alive in at least one small congregation. Last spring I had the privilege of worshipping with about 50 others at Zion's and St. John's (Reed's) Lutheran Church in Stouchsburg, Pennsylvania, a small town about 20 miles west of Reading. What was probably ordinary to those who regularly worship at Reed's struck me as extraordinary. Let me try to explain.

AS A LIFELONG PROTESTANT (I was baptized in a Reformed church, raised an Evangelical United Brethren, and married into Lutheranism), I find the Word of God as embodied in Scripture and sermon central to the meaning of worship on most Sundays. The Gospel reading on this Sunday was the story of Jesus' appearance to the disciples after his resurrection, and it included this invitation: "Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Jesus proceeds to demonstrate his wholeness by eating a piece of broiled fish in the disciples' presence (Luke 24:36-43).

Pastor Virginia Biniek brought this passage into today's reality by framing it with a story Madeleine L'Engle tells about trying to calm her young daughter's fears when a bad dream has awakened her. The mother assures her that God is there to protect her. Her daughter says that that's fine, but what she really wants is someone with "skin on." Pastor Biniek used this story masterfully to communicate the incarnational message of Jesus in the world. She urged us to see Jesus as one who comes with "skin on," a Jesus who is in *this* world, who calls us to be his follower in *this* world. Jesus, with his "skin on," calls us to love our neighbor and feed the hungry.

This challenging and life-transforming message created a central focus for the experience that surrounded it. As on every Sunday, Lois Frantz pumped out several traditional hymns through very old pipes. (Yes, you could hear the creaking of the foot-powered organ.) Later, Ken Saul and his teenage son, Casey, treated the congregation to traditional Appalachian-style gospel songs on fiddle and guitar. I like to call this Ralph Stanley-style music "stained-glass bluegrass" (there's a radio show by this name broadcast on Sunday mornings around Washington, D.C.). As Casey's bow raced over the fiddle strings and Ken picked on

the guitar, the music sounded better to me than that of many professional bluegrass artists I've paid to hear. Their harmonies on "I'll Fly Away" were soul stirring, their rhythms foot stomping.

As in most Lutheran services we also experienced the sacramental Jesus through the sharing of the peace (and in a small congregation that means everyone gets to greet just about everyone) and the sharing of the bread and wine, remembering as we did that the risen Jesus, the one with the "skin on," shares the meal with us.

Capping the service was my first opportunity to participate in a springtime tradition in many rural congregations: the Blessing of the Fields. We marched from the sanctuary to a verdant pasture behind the church and honored the Creator God who brings us "seedtime and harvest, sunshine and rain" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, 43). As we went through the litany of blessings for seed (which contains the miracle of life within), soil (which nourishes the seeds), and water (which sustains both soil and seed), I felt connected to our Native American brothers and sisters, whose theologies seem more rooted in honoring God's gift of creation.

We were reminded in the final words of the ceremony to "walk with those who till, plant, and care for the fields." Harking back to the sermon, we repeated together (with our "skins on"): "May the hungry be fed, and may we always be mindful of their needs and wants."

I'm grateful to the people of Reed's Lutheran Church for allowing me, a city resident for these past 20 years, to share in such meaningful worship on that Sunday morning.

Michael L. Troutman serves as vice president of investments for the ELCA Board of Pensions and is a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in south Minneapolis, Minn.



Strength in Numbers

by Clare La Plante

I KNOW ABOUT COMMUNITIES OF WOMEN—
I GREW UP IN ONE. I HAD FIVE SISTERS AND
A MOTHER IN A HOUSE THAT HAD THIN
WALLS, ONE SMALL BATHROOM, AND ONE
PHONE LINE. I LEARNED HOW TO LOVE MY
OWN SPACE.

I also learned how to share and to be part of a larger group, even when I longed for individuation. Today, with more freedom in my life, I turn to my sisters when I need a sanctuary from a world that can be harsh. After a recent illness, I spent the night at my sister's. In her back bedroom, away from the world, I slept for 12 hours straight, into recuperation. It wasn't just the room. I felt safe in her care.

We all need what I think of as *eternal mothering*: understanding, compassion, and nurturing. And this we women can give each other.

In the circle of women's nurturing lies strength—it's the untapped treasure of thousands of years of tending, listening, and paying attention. It's the collective female bedside vigils, when the fever hits or the dreams terrify, or when life ends. It's more powerful than war. When channeled, it can be more potent than hate and violence.

It's what Clarissa Pinkola Estes describes in her book *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. She talks about the original idea of godmother and how the godmother's role wasn't connected so much with the child, although that was important, as with the child's mother, who needed the wisdom of another woman to nurture and guide her as she set off on this path.

Remembering our birthright

Female researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles—who joked that when the women scientists were under stress, they came in, talked to each other, and cleaned the lab—found in a 2000 study that women responded differently to stress than men did. (These same researchers discovered that until that point, 90 percent of stress research had been done solely on men.) What they found was that women under stress,

instead of going into the “fight or flight” mode, release the hormone oxytocin, which is enhanced by estrogen. This hormone triggers a desire to gather with other women or tend to children, which releases more oxytocin and soothes the nervous system. (Researchers surmise that this mechanism probably helps women live longer than men.)

This is all good news, when we think about how our callings tend to get lost in a world that increasingly values competition and devalues community. We can draw on this, our birthright, when we're feeling down, depressed, or out of sorts.

Without the bonds of friendship, comradeship, and community, we lose our gifts—the gifts of healing, leadership, and inclusion. When this happens, we get pulled into the same whirlpool that has trapped men through the years—isolation, competition, and blame—and we begin to suffer from the maladies that have affected our brothers.

Like a fairy-tale heroine, we must awaken from the dream, descend from the tower, and get back into life. Each of us must find the community that supports our soul. The stakes are higher today, too, when war, injustice, and poverty are spreading worldwide.

Working together


We can start in our prayer life. Include brave women from history and from your own family heritage in your daily ritual of giving thanks. Think of biblical women like Miriam, who acted quickly and courageously to save the life

of her brother Moses. Think of Mary, who spent a lonely but faithful pregnancy trusting herself and her God.

Then tune into yourself. Create a daily ritual that reminds you of the sacred task before you. This could be a morning walk, a

time of meditation, a daily prayer. Create a sanctuary in your home that recalls your community. Hang pictures of role models, friends, or relatives in this spot.

Then reach out to another person—a neighbor, colleague, or friend. Anoint yourself someone's



Places to find communities of women

Although you can find many established groups—and they're a great place to start—you may also decide to build your own community. Start with your passion.

BOOK CLUB For those who love to read and dissect books, find a group of like-minded women. You may choose to have a theme, like travel books or books on spiritual growth, or you may prefer to read across a wide range—everything from Harry Potter to Henry James. Make it fun. Make your club's meetings potluck or bring-your-own-dessert events.

DREAM CLUB Meet with other women who are interested in exploring their dreams. You can keep journals, draw pictures, or just talk about your dreams. You might choose to read books on dreams and help each other interpret them.

MEDITATION OR PRAYER GROUP A perfect way to maintain a spiritual ritual is to do it in community. Start with a group prayer, have silent time together,

and end with intentions. Or share your prayer concerns at the beginning, designate someone to open and close the prayer time, and allow people to pray individually as they wish, keeping in minds the concerns named.

SERVICE GROUP Ask two, three, or more friends to set aside one Sunday afternoon or evening each month to donate to a soup kitchen, a senior center, or other cause. You can be the advocates in your community who speak for the voiceless and show compassion to the forgotten.

RETREAT GROUP Once a month, once a year, or whenever you can, gather a small group of women to attend a retreat. You can share rides, meals, and experiences.

WRITERS' GROUP Meeting regularly with other writers is one of the best ways to beat writer's block.

Create your own group. And write and tell us about it!

godmother in your heart. Tell yourself and tell her—in actions, not words—that you will be a part of her journey, a part of this tapestry of women that was started a long, long time ago.

Take a look around. The role models—and opportunities—are everywhere. To see community being built among young women in the ELCA (and to see how women in your own community are working together), visit www.elca.org/wo/cafe online.

Read about the Christian and Muslim women in Liberia who joined forces to create the Women in Peacebuilding Network. They demanded an unconditional cease-fire in that war-torn country—rather than more “peace-keeping missions.” (The network was co-founded by Comfort Free-

man, president of the National Lutheran Church Women in Liberia. See the article on page 16.)

Perhaps you would like to check out Codepink (www.codepinkalert.org). Codepink is a women-oriented organization that seeks positive change through creative means (such as handing out pink slips—pink lingerie—to public officials, the media, and others in the public eye who aren’t up to speed on ensuring fair and respectful treatment of women).

Or create a group yourself. Look in your own neighborhood for opportunities to work at homeless shelters, soup kitchens, or after-school programs, where women, every day, work for a better community. Bring these seeds of hope into your heart. Join a book club, writing club,

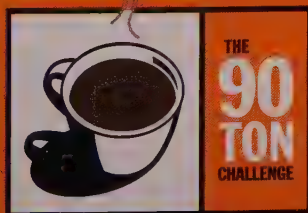
dream club, or coffee (or herbal tea) club. (See sidebar, opposite.)

Without a committed community of like-minded souls, we can spend our lives as though we were sleepwalking. We may have the best pajamas—or the fanciest beds to climb back into—but sleepwalking, after all, is being only half-awake, missing out on a full life.

Fight the scourge of isolation. Reach out to another woman—sister, mother, friend, or stranger. Offer her your wisdom and love, and expect nothing in return. In this way our circle grows larger, and our power to make a positive difference increases in ways we can scarcely imagine.

Clare La Plante is a writer who lives in Chicago.

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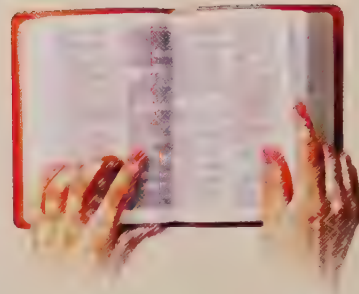
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Session 5

Confident of Your Obedience



by Robin Mattison

Study Text

Philemon 1–25

Theme Verse

“I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ.” (Philemon 6)

Overview

Paul had a lot to think about as he considered how to write his brief letter to the Christians who met in Philemon’s house. He could be confident that all of them had experienced the direct intervention of God in their lives and that they perceived themselves as equals in imitation of Christ. Social equality, however, was not a fundamental value of the culture they lived in. In Greco-Roman culture, civil and familial structures were marked by clear hierarchies: master over slave, husband over wife, father over children.

Hence, Paul’s values and those of this community he had founded were bound to come into conflict in this situation: Onesimus, a pagan slave of Paul’s beloved co-worker Philemon, had fled his master. He ended up in the same prison as Paul. There Onesimus received the word of God in power through Paul’s testimony and was converted. Now what?

What effect would the conversion of a pagan runaway slave have on the relationship between that slave and his Christian master? Could Onesimus reenter

Philemon’s household as an equal brother in Christ? What would become of the working relationship between Philemon and Onesimus if their spiritual relationship were one of equals?

In this one session on Paul’s letter to Philemon, we will find out how Paul aimed to persuade Philemon of the value of the revelation God had given Paul about being equal in Christ and one in Christ. This letter will also give us a chance to reflect on our own concerns about class, racial, and gender discrimination, and faith.

Because Paul made his points with great care, we will read sections of this short letter more than once to be clear about how Paul worked to persuade his readers.

Opening

Read Philemon 1–3, 23–24. Note the greetings, thanksgivings, and prayers at the beginning and end of the letter. Paul borrowed the language of roles in the wider Gentile society to describe the members of the Christian community in these verses. Note which roles he redefined to describe the relationships among believers in the community.

Do Christians still redefine social roles to describe who we are toward one another and how we spread God’s good news? What social roles might you choose to describe your vocation in Christ? In twos and threes, pray for each other’s vocation in Christ in

the language of the social role that each one has chosen. For example, “We thank God for Louise, our sister and pediatrician. You have blessed us and our children by giving her this vocation. May she be a blessing to her patients and they to her so that together they might praise you for the wonders of growth and health. Amen”

Do We Thank God for Paul?

Was Paul manipulative in his writing to Philemon? Some seminary students think so. Have someone in the group read the entire text of Philemon aloud.

1. What do you think of Paul’s repeated use of language about coerced and voluntary action? Does it make you uncomfortable? Why? Why might Paul have chosen to write in this way?

Paul Thanks God for Philemon

In Greek, it is easy to tell when the pronoun *you* is singular or plural because the two forms are different words: *su* (singular) and *hymeis* (plural, pronounced “humeis”). It is much harder to read or hear the distinction between singular and plural *you* in English.

This distinction makes a huge difference in the letter to Philemon. Have someone read aloud Philemon 1–3, saying “you all” for each “you” that appears. Then have her continue reading Philemon 4–9, saying “you alone” for each “you” in that section.

Do the same at the end of the letter. Have someone read Philemon 21–24, saying “you alone” for each “you” there. In Philemon 25, switch back to “you all.” Here is a summary of “you” references in what has just been read:

Philemon 1–3: all references to “you” are plural, addressing the community.

Philemon 4–24: all references to “you” are singular, addressing Philemon.

Philemon 25: all references to “you” are plural.

2. Why would Paul want to surround his address to Philemon with an address to the whole community?

3. Now that you know which parts of the greeting, thanksgiving, and prayer are addressed to whom, compare the thanksgiving and prayer in 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10 with the thanksgiving and prayer in Philemon 1–7. How similar are they? Is there something Philemon had not yet fully done that the Thessalonians are fully engaged in? (The lack mentioned in verse 6 provides a clue to Paul’s goal for the letter.)

WHERE IS YOUR HEART?

Modern Americans are quite sure that the seat of the emotions is the heart. Think of Valentine’s Day. In the Greco-Roman culture, the seat of the emotions was the bowels. Think of butterflies in your stomach. When the English text reads, “the *hearts* of the saints have been refreshed” (v. 7), “refresh my *heart*” (v. 20), or “my own *heart*” (v. 12), it is translating the Greek word *splanchna* (pronounced “splangka”), which means “bowels,” used as a metaphor for “feelings.”

Notice how very different understandings of the human body can be reflected in the descriptions of a common human experience—emotional connection to someone or something—in different languages. In Greek, the heart is the seat of intelligence, not emotions.

Prison

Being imprisoned was a recurring obstacle for Paul and other apostles of the Gentile Christian mission. Paul was in prison with Timothy (v. 1) and Epaphras (v. 23) when he wrote to Philemon. He was also in prison when he wrote to the Philippians. In Romans 16:7, he referred to the apostles Andronicus and Junia as brother and sister prisoners.

Prison conditions in the Roman Empire were not like those in the United States today. The Greek word for *prisoner* (*desmios*) meant someone bound in chains or fetters. Unlike the modern prison system, where a prisoner is confined to a cell with jailers providing

food and sanitation, the ancient system was more like house arrest. The Roman soldiers who oversaw the prisoner had no obligation to provide anything. Paul couldn't leave his guards and chains, but he could write letters, receive visitors, and organize a support team of believers to bring him food and to care for his spiritual and personal needs. In fact, it was crucial that someone bring food to him. Otherwise, he could have starved to death in prison. Depending on the charges against him, Paul could have been imprisoned for a short or long time with an uncertain outcome. When he wrote to the Philippians from prison, he was facing execution.

RHETORIC IN A LAND WITHOUT 500 CHANNELS AND THE INTERNET

In the Greco-Roman culture, important issues and ideas of the day were communicated by public orators who were skilled in rhetoric—the art of persuasive public speaking and writing. People were instructed by oratory through such public events as speeches at the legislature, at the law courts, at funerals, or at celebrations for the gods. They enjoyed listening to imaginative, well-crafted speeches and plays and delighted in hearing novels, poetry, or letters read aloud in public. Even the Gospels were written to be read aloud, according to these same rules of rhetoric.

Paul was a master of rhetoric. Philemon's community would have

been very impressed by Paul's letter. His deft use of language and theme would have delighted his readers at the same time that his message instructed them. He wrote using the three great characteristics of Greek oratory.

First is *ethos*, which proves Paul's authority to address Philemon and the house church. For example, he was a prisoner *for Christ* (v. 1) and an old man, an elder statesman (v. 9), and the founder of their Christian community.

Second is *pathos*, which involves stirring Philemon's emotions about the matter Paul sought to address. For example, Paul commended Philemon for refreshing his heart

(v. 7) and for doing even more than Paul asked (v. 21). He told Philemon he would have the best blessing of all if Onesimus returned as a brother (v. 16).

Third is *logos*, which is the logical, persuasive argument aimed to move Philemon to agreement with Paul by the end of the letter. For example, at the beginning of the letter, Philemon is hearing about Paul's imprisonment and the unexpected whereabouts of that insolent slave Onesimus, due to be put to death upon his return to Philemon. At the end, if Philemon is persuaded by Paul, he would be awaiting a new brother in Christ and a visit from the community's founder!

Slavery

Slavery in the first century was parallel to slavery in the old American South in several ways. In neither time could slaves own property; they themselves were property. Their families could be split up and sold away from them. Their masters (in Greek, “lord”) could be kind or cruel. They were guaranteed severe punishment or death if they ran away.

On the other hand, ancient slavery was not reserved for people of a particular race or color. Slaves were often of the same ethnic group as their masters. They might have been sold into slavery for payment of debt, or they might have been captives of war. Slaves of upper-class households could amass enough money to buy their freedom, or they might be freed by the owner for loyal service. On a large estate, slaves could hold any position except those reserved to family members. They could be accountants, bakers, educators, musicians, and doctors as well as field workers. In imperial households, they might become rich. For example, in Acts 8:26–40, the wealthy Ethiopian in charge of all the Candace’s treasure, to whom God sent Philip to bring the good news, was most likely a slave. His condition as a eunuch signals his slave status.

The Philemon-Paul-Onesimus Triangle¹

Have someone read aloud Philemon 10–19. Four sets of overlapping relationships are part of the narrative Paul is telling. In chronological order—not necessarily narrative order—they are (1) Paul and Philemon, (2) Philemon and Onesimus, (3) Onesimus and Paul, and (4) Paul and Philemon again, in the letter. Since Paul is telling the story, he weaves his persuasion into the narrative. Still, we can discern some details about the four sets of relationships.

4. What clashes of values about equality, honor, and shame can be seen in this passage? You may want to refresh your understanding of Paul’s view of equality by looking back at the Overview. You may also find it helpful to record your observations.

Persuading Philemon

Let’s explore the themes that Paul set in motion to express the conflicting values he saw between the Christian gospel and the Greco-Roman social hierarchy. Let one person slowly read aloud Philemon 1–23. The others should divide into four groups to listen to the reading, each group listening for its assigned theme. (Some groups have two words per value, because Paul is talking about his own actions and other people’s actions from different perspectives.)

	NEGATIVE	VS.	POSITIVE
GROUP 1:	imprisonment	vs.	freedom
GROUP 2:	slavery	vs.	family
GROUP 3:	command/ forced response	vs.	appeal/ voluntary response
GROUP 4:	debt owed/ liability	vs.	debt repaid/ benefit

5. Let each group report its observations. Do you see something similar about all the negative values? Do you see something similar about all the positive values?

Bold to Command, But Preferring to Appeal

By now the particular rhetorical tactics Paul used to persuade Philemon should be emerging for you. For example:

- Paul wrote to the whole community so that the matter was not a secret and so that Philemon did not have to make a decision alone. A decision to receive Onesimus back and the new relationship

that would arise from that decision would require the support of the whole community.

- Paul used family language for Philemon and Onesimus. He identified himself as father of both (vss. 10, 19) and identified both as beloved brothers. They had become brothers to each other through Paul's having begotten them in the Gospel.
- He made clear that a proper solution to the situation with Onesimus would be central to the heart that Paul wanted refreshed (vss. 7, 12, 20).
- He transferred the debt owed Philemon into a debt that Paul would pay. He canceled the debt of Onesimus's poor work for Philemon (he had formerly been "useless"—v. 11) with Onesimus's effective service to Paul in place of Philemon.

- He claimed authority as the one who had converted both Philemon and Onesimus, but he appealed to Philemon. So his strongest authority was implied, not written out.

This is only a partial list; many more tactics could be picked out.

How Effective Was Paul's Letter to This Christian Assembly?

Have someone read the letter aloud one last time.

In preparation, divide into three groups that will listen as if they were (1) Apphia, Archippus, and other members of Philemon's community, (2) Philemon, and (3) Onesimus.

AUTHORSHIP IN PAUL'S TIME

How does a modern writer honor the work of a predecessor? You might acknowledge that person's influence in the dedication, and you would certainly make your source clear by citing the person's work, in footnotes or in other attributions. Otherwise, you could be sued for copyright infringement or fired for plagiarism.

Authorship wasn't regarded that way in the first century. To honor the one who has influenced you, you put his or her name on your book or letter. The thoughts and values in your book won't be exactly the

same as the famous writer's, but you will have honored those values. Moreover, your newer ideas will appear to have the same authority as that of the famous writer's works. And you gain other advantages. The person whose name you have put on your work is someone of importance, so that name will ensure that your book or letter is read. For all these reasons, the philosopher Plato, a follower of Socrates, put all his own thoughts on the lips of Socrates in the 30 dialogues he wrote.²

You may have heard of the difficulties that modern musicians have had with their songs being downloaded from the Internet without

acknowledgment or royalties being paid to the composers. Similar things happened in the first century. The works of famous writers were often copied by others who signed their own names and reaped the profits. No copyright laws to safeguard writers existed.

Paul's letters were so famous among Gentile Christians that everyone from followers to forgers wrote using his name. Some wanted to honor him; some didn't quite understand him; some desired to modify some of his values while still claiming authority from his name. It all began to resemble an ancient written version of the game "Telephone."

6. What different perspectives do you have on the letter? If Paul's persuasion is successful, what changes will happen in the desires or values that Philemon, Onesimus, or Paul had at the beginning of the story?

7. The letter to Philemon was preserved by Philemon's house church, so we can surmise that it was well received. But we will never know for sure whether Paul achieved his intent, because the letter depended on persuasion, not coercion. What issues are left open because Paul chose persuasion as his strategy? Reread verse 14. Would force have been a better approach? Whose responses to this letter would you like to have heard?

GO DEEPER—PAUL'S LETTER: PROBLEM OR POSSIBILITY?

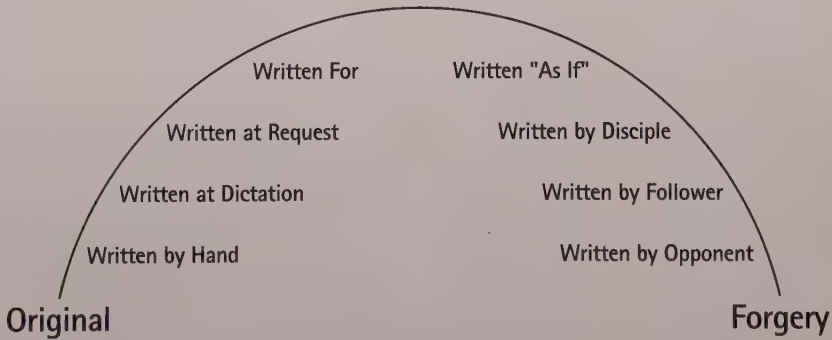
Some people think that Paul didn't do enough to eliminate slavery. Certainly, his fundamental value was freedom for Christ-like obedience through adaptation of social structures, not freedom from oppressive social structures in itself.

One way to evaluate Paul's thoughts on slavery is to compare the letter to Philemon with some other letters attributed to Paul that refer to slavery. Most scholars agree that certain letters were actually written by Paul's later followers, who honored but adapted Paul's values for their own church situations: Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus are among these. Their vocabulary, sentence structure, description of the work of Christ, and

Changes began with the person who took Paul's dictation, who might have made minor changes for clarity. Then Paul himself might have asked someone to send Paul's thoughts in a letter to someone else. Perhaps that third person rewrote that document and sent it on to yet another person, still with Paul's name on it. After Paul's death, other followers in towns that Paul had visited might have written letters of greeting "as if" Paul had written to them. Then others—whether disciples who knew Paul personally or followers who knew him only by reputation—might have "contemporized" his values for new settings.

Finally, opponents of Paul might have written in his name, along with others who wanted to profit (financially or otherwise) from his reputation. In this last category, I would count as most suspect those sections of letters that seek to persuade readers and hearers to

restrict slaves and women again as in the household codes of Aristotle. New Testament letters with such sections are Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. The chart below shows the possible understandings of authorship in the first century.



Source: Chart from David Barr's *New Testament Story: An Introduction*, 3rd edition. ©2002. Reprinted with permission of Wadsworth, a division of Thomson Learning: www.thomsonrights.com. Fax: 800-730-2215.

description of the church as an institution all reflect a time later than Paul's. Moreover, their understanding of the relationship between slaves and masters is quite different from what Paul's heart desired, as he expressed it in the letter to Philemon.

It may be shocking to some to realize that certain letters in Scripture were not actually written by the person whose name is attached to them. But in antiquity, claiming authorship by a famous person was not evidence of intent to deceive; rather, it reflects a belief that the text was written faithfully in the tradition or school of the claimed author, perhaps extending the thought of the claimed author to meet the problems of a later day. Within the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition, such pseudonymous writing was a long-standing tradition.

Colossians 3:22–25, written around A.D. 65, provides a good example. Recall the themes of Philemon from question 5. Which theme is dominant in the household code of Colossians, slavery or family? What about command/forced response and appeal/voluntary response? Which is more dominant—the theme of debt owed/liability or debt repaid/benefit? Is Roman hierarchy stressed or Christian unity or equality? Is the Lord identified with the slave or with the master, given that the same Greek word means both *master* and *lord*? Are the masters and slaves to imitate Christ or other believers?

From these contrasts, scholars surmise that after Paul's death, many Gentile Christian assemblies formed their congregations around Greco-Roman social hierarchies of master over slave, husband over wife, father over children, which hardened the very heart of freedom in Christ that Paul had wanted to be refreshed.

Closing

Reflect briefly on how hierarchies of any sort—according to economic status, culture, race, gender, class—

result in Christians who hesitate to respond to each other as beloved brothers and sisters. If you have a personal example, offer it if you wish. Let us all pray that we may openly accept the very people, like Onesimus, whom God has claimed but whom our social hierarchies and secular values teach us to disdain and despise. May we thank God for them and be eager to hear their testimony to the good news!

Looking Ahead

Next month, we begin our study of Philippians. In Philippians 1:1–30, Paul was again in prison and writing to care for others while he awaited execution. If you wish to visualize the difficulty of such ministry in a modern setting, you might watch *Hanged from a Twisted Cross*, a 1996 film biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor and theologian. You might also read Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), Eberhard Bethge's edited collection of Bonhoeffer's writings while he awaited execution for his participation in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

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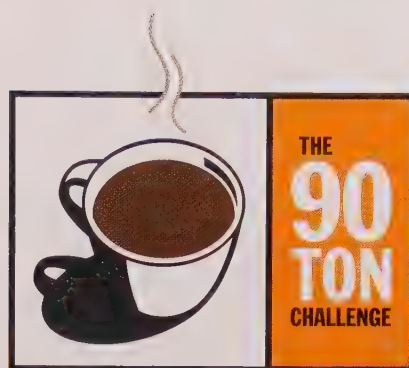
Notes

1. Lloyd A. Lewis, "An African-American Appraisal of the Philemon-Paul-Onesimus Triangle," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 232–46.

2. David Barr, *New Testament Story* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002), 89.

POUR IT ON!

by Brenda Meier



Pour Justice to the Brim

In the October 2003 issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* magazine, “Pour Justice to the Brim: The 90-Ton Challenge” was launched. This challenge is aimed at doubling the amount of fair-trade coffee purchased through the Lutheran World Relief (LWR) Coffee Project from 45 tons (the amount purchased through the project in 2002) to 90 tons during this yearlong effort, from October 2003 to October 2004.

The income from fair-trade sales allows farmers and artisans to educate their children, build health clinics, and dig wells that provide clean drinking water to their villages. Women are placed in leadership roles in their farming and artisan cooperatives. Cultural customs are sustained as parents teach children the farming techniques that have been used in their families for generations. All these are made possible because of the simple choice you can make, starting today.

As of November 5, 2003—when this article was going to press—8 tons of fair-trade coffee had already been purchased through the LWR Coffee Project since the launching of the challenge. This represents a

51-percent increase over the same time frame in 2002. Will you help top off this cup of justice? Start the LWR Coffee Project in your parish. Or help those who are already coordinating it. Look for opportunities to share a gift of fair-trade coffee with a friend, neighbor, or family member. And be sure to share your knowledge about fair trade along with the gift.

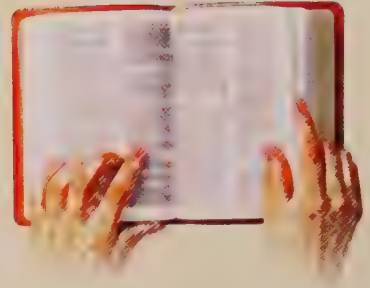
You won't be alone in your efforts to promote fair trade and offer a better life to coffee farmers. There's strength in numbers as your efforts are added to those of more than 3,300 parishes already participating in the LWR Coffee Project. Not to mention that Lutheran World Relief, Equal Exchange (LWR's partner in the LWR Coffee Project), and Women of the ELCA will be your partners along the way. Visit www.lwr.org/coffee for ideas and resources. Call 800-LWR-LWR-2 for brochures, posters, and fliers.

Brenda Meier is the communication associate for parish projects and partnerships at Lutheran World Relief in Baltimore, Md.

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Session 6

Rejoice! My Imprisonment Is for Christ!



by Robin Mattison

Study Text

Philippians 1:1–30

Theme Verse

“I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel.” (Philippians 1:12)

Overview

The letter to the Philippians may be Paul’s last letter. We know that he was in prison when he wrote it, but we do not know whether this was his early imprisonment at Ephesus (A.D. 54–55) or his final imprisonment at Rome (A.D. 62). The community of the Philippians had given him the most support throughout his ministry, and Paul wanted to persuade them that his dire situation was an occasion for rejoicing, because the evil that had come upon him was an opportunity to point out the wrath and mercy of God.

How successful Paul would be with his persuasion would depend on whether he could help the Philippians stand confidently on three points of faith: (1) yes, God was still acting to save; (2) yes, Paul’s and the Philippian community’s persecutions paralleled Jesus’ experience and were thus occasions for rejoicing; and (3) yes, the day of resurrection was near. It was Paul’s hope that with a grasp of these points the Philippians would better understand the why and how of rejoicing under persecution.

Opening

Each letter we have studied begins the same way: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1c; Philemon 3). What did *grace* mean to Paul? It is helpful to look at the Greek word he used—*charis*. The word means favor, kindness, goodwill, loveliness, influence, pleasure, charity, offering, gift. Take turns trying out Paul’s greeting using these or similar words. After greeting one another, pray that all people might know such divine favor. Briefly share your thoughts on what it was like to use these other words in the greeting.

One of These Things Was Not like the Other

The introduction of Paul’s letter to the Philippians is similar to the introduction of 1 Thessalonians: senders, receivers, announcement of grace, thanksgiving, and a statement of the special relationship between the apostles and the assembly. The letter to the Philippians, like the letter to Philemon, has a prayer for special growth in the community (1:9–11).

1. Paul’s introductions always signal important topics that will come up later in the letter. Compare the introduction of 1 Thessalonians (1:1–10) with that of Philippians (1:3–11). The two introductions are very similar, yet there are several noteworthy differences in words and themes in the Philippians text. List the differences that you find.

Then review the passages listed below to see what differences in words and themes you may have noted occur later in the letter to the Philippians. Each reference below has one focus.

a. 2:5–8; 2:17

b. 4:2–3

c. 1:18, 25; 2:17; 3:1; 4:1, 10

d. 1:12–17

e. 3:4–9

Say That Again

Paul's rhetoric in Philippians 1:1–30 reinforces his faith as *charismatic*, *typological*, and *eschatological*. In this exercise, you will discover how his repetition reinforces those values.

Your leader will read aloud the first chapter of Philippians as you and others listen for repeated words and ideas. Group 1 will consider language about the present activity of God (evidence of the community's *charismatic* faith). Group 2 will be looking for words that describe unity or imitation (their *typological* faith). Each group will underline words in these assigned categories as they are found. Don't worry about getting them all.

Group 1 should watch for language about God acting in the present for Paul and the Philippians—for instance, God providing grace and peace. Also watch for believers' activities in relationship to God or Christ in the present: praying, boasting, rejoicing, having confidence, perceiving the signs of God's action, and so on.

Group 2 should watch for evidence of the Philippians' effective imitation of Christ or Paul. Look for words such as *share*, *same*, *side by side*, *unity*, *help*, *proclaim from love*. Look also for evidence of not imitating Christ or Paul: selfish ambition, fear, false motives, proclaiming from envy and rivalry.

We can also see several elements of Paul's *eschato-*

logical faith in this chapter. Underline "the day of Christ" (1:10), "depart and be with Christ" (1:23), "evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation" (1:28). Note that the phrases about Christ are either about Jesus' actions in his life on earth to be imitated, such as compassion (1:8) and love (1:9), or about Christ's actions at the end time. It is God who is active in the present.

Let each group report its observations to the whole group. You will see words from these three dimensions of Paul's faith repeated throughout the letter.

Last Prayer and Testament

Paul prayed a very important, detailed prayer for the vocation of the Philippians in the face of his probable execution. Paul was praying that God would provide for them a specific thing they lacked.

2. Look closely at 1:9–11.

A. What can you infer that the Philippians are already doing well?

_____ (1:9)

B. What do they need more of?

_____ (1:9)

C. What are they not fully equipped to do because the quality named in B is insufficient?

_____ (1:10)

D. What might they lack in the day of Christ if they cannot do what is named in C?

_____ (1:10)

E. What won't they be able to produce without what is named in B, C, and D?

_____ (1:11)

F. Whose righteousness is this?

_____ (1:11)

G. Why should the righteousness of this person be imitated?

_____ (1:11)

Try stating Paul's prayer in your own prayer style.

THE WOMEN OF PHILIPPI

The cult of the emperor was the state religion in Philippi, but native Thracian and Greek men and women also had significant options for “single-gender” religion. Men’s cults focused on military deities; women had prominent roles in the religions of Diana, Dionysius, and Isis. Some women in Philippi held leadership positions in municipal government, and some participated openly in athletic contests. In the Philippian assembly, Paul found capable women eager to serve in leadership roles, for example, Euodia and Syntyche.

Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel

Read Philippians 1:12–18. This section of chapter 1 might be startling to us, but Paul’s views were perfectly consistent with his faith. Paul understood that God was acting to transform his role as prisoner and overturn the assumptions of captivity. The guards could not hold the gospel captive; rather, the captors would be captured by the gospel.

3. What events does Paul mention in Philippians 1:12–14 that give him confidence that he is defending and confirming the gospel (vss. 7, 16)?

Look again at verses 15–18. Some others (possibly Christian leaders from the mission to the Jews), slaves to the evil of envy, saw Paul’s imprisonment as an opportunity to diminish Paul’s stature among the Christians.

4. What surprising statement does Paul make about the situation described in verses 15–18? What makes this situation an occasion for rejoicing?

To Live Is Christ and to Die Is Gain

Have someone read 1:20–26 aloud. Recall from the letter to Philemon how important it was to Paul that Philemon choose freely to receive Onesimus back as he would a sibling. The same issue of choice runs through Paul’s rhetoric here. Paul has thoughtfully set up the matter of his impending death with careful logic in order to invite the Philippians into his discernment and reassure them at the same time. If he were to die, he wanted them to be stable, identified with Christ, unified in Christ, and still proclaiming that the promises of God are sure.

The essential phrases of Paul’s logic are the ones he uses to describe the difference between dying and living: “to depart and be with Christ . . . is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you” (1:23–24). Seeing both resolutions as “in Christ” was the result of “full insight,” the gift he prayed that God would give the Philippians in 1:9–11. Paul writes as though he has a choice about living or dying, but that may be inaccurate; the jailers could execute him at any time. Paul is not inviting death but seeking to emphasize that he is setting his life in Christ as a model (a type) for the Philippians, since they too have been graced with persecution (1:29–30).

5. Review carefully 1:27–30. Throughout the first chapter, Paul has drawn comparisons between his conduct and that of the Philippians. Based on these verses and your other observations about this letter, if Paul were put to death, what would he think a life worthy of the gospel of Christ would look like?

GO DEEPER—A MODERN PRISONER FOR CHRIST

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an imprisoned Lutheran pastor and theologian, wrote this letter to his friend

Eberhard Bethge as he awaited execution for his part in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Compare this letter to Philippians 1:20–26. What elements are similar?

August 23, 1944

Please don't ever get anxious or worried about me, but don't forget to pray for me—I'm sure you don't! I am so sure of God's guiding hand that I hope I shall always be kept in that certainty. You must never doubt that I am traveling with gratitude and cheerfulness along the road where I am being led. My past life is brim-ful of God's goodness, and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified. I am most thankful for the people I have met, and I only hope that they never have to grieve about me, but that they too will be always certain of, and thankful for, God's mercy and forgiveness. Forgive my writing this. Don't let it grieve or upset you for a moment, but let it make you happy. But I did want to say it for once, and I could not be sure of any one else who I could be sure would take it all right. . . .

I do so hope you will have a quiet time in body and mind. May God take care of you and all of us, and grant us the joy of meeting again soon. I am praying for you everyday.

Your true and grateful friend, D.¹

Their Destruction, Your Salvation

Review 1:27–30. Paul understood that before Christ, people spent their lives in bondage to inevitable death, because they feared it. Seeking to avert inevitable death, they fell into sin, a bondage to things that began as blessings from God but that people remade into idols.

Now, because of Christ's obedience to God in bringing good news to those in bondage to death, there is a new Lord, one raised by God. Who will know this? Those standing side by side, without

fear, proclaiming the good news. Who will not know this? The opponents who were persecuting the fearless proclaimers. So the same event will be evidence of believers' salvation (they are fearless because they know Christ) and evidence of the opponents' destruction (they perceive confidence in God as arrogance before their own power).

The Greek word that translates as “evidence” means something closer to “omen.” That is, these moments are only omens and do not unfailingly predict the final result, because the power of God will be with the Philippians to make sure the news gets out! Remember, what led to Paul's conversion was his own arrogance about his status before God, confronting the testimony of the obedient, humble Christian believers in whom God's power rested. Now that was a converting experience!

6. Look back at the opening exercise, in which we listed alternate definitions of the blessings of grace from 1:2. What would be the opposites of these words? What would life be like if God were to turn away?

Go back to question 2, which discusses the prayer at 1:9–11, to remind yourself what the Philippians' life would be like without full insight from God. Such a life would also be lived under some divine displeasure.

7. List the internal characteristics of those who sought to afflict Paul (1:15–18). The gospel was not stopped, but what would life be like for these people?

Take a Letter

Consider this letter from an imaginary synodical women's organization president:

Erda, a synodical women's organization president of Women of the ELCA in Springfield. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Women of the ELCA. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank you for your many prayers for me in my illness. As you know, I have been proclaiming the gospel as best I can while on leave from my post. Now I need your counsel. Some sisters seem to be competing with one another to proclaim the gospel as SWO president in my place.

The doctors have said I may return soon to my office. How do I recover the leadership of the proclamation of the gospel? Or should I? I want your help so that my sisters and I might become one again, focused, and stumble-free on the day of Christ. What would be best for Christ's harvest?

I attribute my return to my post to your prayers and to the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

8. How might you, in the spirit of Paul and the Philippian community, answer Erda's letter?

Closing

Reread 1:3–5, 9–11, 18d–19. There are two types of prayer in this chapter and one description of the efficacy of others' prayers for Paul.

Let us employ all three in our closing: prayers as thanksgiving to God, prayers as petitions for others to God through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, prayers as petitions for ourselves as offered by others to God through Jesus Christ.

List the names of each person in your group in a journal or notebook. Under each name, write *Thanksgivings*, and further below, *Petitions*. Then have each person in the group, in turn, provide two thanksgivings and two petitions. One thanksgiving and one petition should be in relation to the partici-

pant's own life (not anyone else's). The others can be about anyone or anything in the world. Make a commitment to pray these thanksgivings and petitions daily for all the members until you gather for the next session. (If the group is very large, you may wish to divide into groups of five.)

Once all have spoken, begin praying others' thanksgivings and petitions immediately. Let each person choose another participant whose thanksgivings and petitions she wants to offer to God right then.

Finally, close by sharing the kiss of peace and saying a version of this blessing: "God and our Lord Jesus bless you with grace and peace."

Looking Ahead

The study text for the next session is Philippians 2:1–31. In the three epistles we are studying, here is where Paul's faith convictions about Christ's death and resurrection are clearest. Although he still does not quote the Jewish scriptures even at this important point, he does make a persuasive case for Christ as a Jewish Messiah wearing Gentile garb. We will learn how Paul did it next month. We will also compare the hymn to Christ in Colossians 1:15–20 with Paul's masterpiece in Philippians 2:6–11. You may want to read ahead.

The Rev. Dr. Robin Mattison is associate professor of New Testament and Greek at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

Note

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 208.



Women Investing in Mission

Lutheran women—and the congregational and synodical organizations they have founded—are helping to build the church by investing in the **MISSION INVESTMENT FUND OF THE ELCA**. To learn how you and your women's organization can participate or for current interest rates, call the Fund today at **(800) 638-3522, ext. 2943**.



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this month's **QUESTION**

Go to www.elca.org/wo/lwt to enter your response.
(Results will appear in the June 2004 issue.)

Q: When taking vacation time, I most often

- A. stay at home and work on personal projects
- B. visit family members or friends who don't live nearby
- C. organize family members or friends to do service projects
- D. try to visit new places and meet new people in locations away from my hometown

Results from Question of the Month (September 2003)

Q: Most of my closest friends are . . .

Here's what you said:

older than I am	19.2%
younger than I am	7.7%
about my same age	30.8%
of all different ages	42.3%

EARNING INTEREST FAITHFULLY

by Marlys Taege Moberg

I'd like to tell you about four women, each with a passion for faith and finance. All four have felt a calling, they say, to help ministry get accomplished. All four work in a field they never expected to enter, a field that attracted few women 25 years ago. They still sometimes hear the comment, "Ugh, why would you want to do that?" Their profession? Charitable fund-raising.

For Nancy Ackermann, director of development for Solheim Lutheran Home in Los Angeles, appreciation of the importance of money as a tool for ministry empowerment began when she was a child. The chairperson of her home congregation did a series of talks on stewardship each year, which she remembers as "just inspiring!" She says, "It does take money to make Christ known. Helping to raise that money seems to be my niche."

A pastor's wife and mother of two daughters, Cindy Halverson began her career in the communications department of a Chicago

bank. After one year, she recalls, "I was bored." Then she heard about a public relations position with Lutheran Child and Family Services. Before long she was doing not only its communications but also its fund-raising. "I had no idea of the need such agencies face," she says. "In fact, I was surprised that the church had jobs like mine." Currently Halverson is director of the ELCA Fund for Leaders in Mission, a position that brings special joy because, besides seeking funding, she helps award scholarships to students at the ELCA's eight seminaries.

A former systems analyst in the actuarial department of an insurance company, Lorelee Hood took a substantial pay cut to become assistant director of the Sustaining Fund of Luther Seminary, St. Paul. Nevertheless, she says, "It was the perfect move for me. There's fantastic joy in making a difference, in helping people. And every day I'm associating with future church leaders!"

Carol Hammarberg has a master's degree in administration and is an experienced social worker who has done refugee resettlement, foster care placements, and adoptions. When she got the urge to "do something different," she became manager of the annual fund for Ken-Crest, a Lutheran agency based in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania. Ken-Crest provides supportive services to 6,000 children and adults who have developmental disabilities. The fund raises venture capital to develop new programs.

All four women invest their time and talents helping others make wise investments. It takes money to run programs, offer services, and plan for the future. Isn't it good to know that caring, compassionate people are involved in making that happen for the church and its people?

The benefits of giving

For these women and dozens like them, fund-raising is a career that has become increasingly important to the continuing outreach of the Lutheran church. In an uncertain economy, the need grows daily.

Lutheran Services in America (LSA), for example, includes 300 health and human service organizations. These agencies serve 5.8 million clients in 3,000 communities in the United States and the Caribbean and have a total operating budget of \$7.6 billion, much of which must come from contributions. Lutheran church bodies, seminaries, colleges, universities, and auxiliaries also depend heavily on charitable gifts.

It can be confusing for donors to determine where, when, what, and how to give. Most people do not realize how much good they can afford to do through charitable estate planning—through gift annuities, charitable trusts, bequests, gifts of stocks, bonds, insurance, in-kind donations, or cash. Each type of gift involves different benefits to the donor, including tax deductions of varying levels.

Recognizing their ethical obligation to maintain a high level of professional competence in order to be of greatest service to donors, 56 Lutheran men in development careers founded the

Association of Lutheran Development Executives (ALDE) in 1979 to educate and mentor the church's fund-raisers. Today ALDE has over 800 men and 200 women members.

ALDE's Code of Ethical Principles and Practices requires its members to seek to serve Christ faithfully, to work for the best interest of the donor, and to ensure appropriate use of designated gifts. Members are also required to strive for honest reporting and optimal management of all solicited funds; they must also comply with all federal, state, municipal, and provincial laws. The code's ethical and investment requirements rest on a distinctively Christian foundation. (For more information about the ALDE Code of Ethical Principles and Practices, visit www.alde.org/info/ethics.html on the Web.)

A donor's bill of rights

Lutheran development officers recognize that donors have rights, including the assurance that their gifts will be used for the purposes for which they were given, that their donations will be handled with respect and confidentiality, and that they not only are welcome to ask questions but will receive prompt, truthful, and forthright

answers. Isn't that what community building is all about?

Based on these principles, development officers become partners with donors in achieving maximum results for their contributions and enabling them to make a difference in this world. As development officers link donors with Christian ministry opportunities that match their passions, the donors experience the joy of extending Christ's love at home and abroad in special ways.

Furthermore, through charitable estate planning, donors can continue giving to their favorite causes after God has called them to their eternal reward. That's why Ackermann, Halverson, Hood, Hammarberg, and all their Lutheran counterparts, both male and female, say, "This work is so exciting and fulfilling—it's a wonderful way to help people and support what you believe in!"

Marlys Taege Moberg, of Milwaukee, Wis., is the first woman to serve as president of the Association of Lutheran Development Executives and the first person to receive its prestigious Virgil Anderson award for "exemplary leadership and service to a Lutheran organization in the development field."

If you have ever gone swimming in a river, you know that swimming against the current takes energy and stamina. It is much easier and more comfortable to “go with the flow.”

Yet those who are able to swim upstream are often the ones who make the greatest differences for good in the world.

Annette Janka has been swimming upstream for over 25 years. Living on a houseboat in Cordova, Alaska, she uses her musical talent to work with children and youth at St. George’s Episcopal Church. Her call to serve an Episcopal congregation came long before the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) entered into full communion with the Episcopal Church.

Melinda Lando, a pediatric nurse practitioner at the Bronx Lebanon Hospital Center, cares for chil-

brings her talent for liturgical dance into the healing ministry that she performs. Cecille is currently in training to become a clinical pastoral education (CPE) supervisor.

Sally Kerr, a religious-training teacher and spiritual counselor at the Silver Springs–Martin Luther School in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, works with emotionally disturbed children. She directs a program in which children help to plant, tend, and harvest crops and raise chickens and goats. Through the program, the children gain confidence, learn to appreciate God’s creation and creatures, and are able to accept responsibility for caring for

ELCA Deaconesses:

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

by Carol A. Burk

dren with HIV/AIDS. She is also an active volunteer in the worship program at St. Peter Lutheran Church, located beneath the massive Citicorp building in Manhattan.

Monica Denk serves as a deaconess in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). She is licensed by the ELCIC to serve as an interim pastor in churches that are without a pastor. She is one of a number of women who serve in the ELCIC but are members of the Deaconess Community of the ELCA.

Ramona Cecille joyfully serves as a chaplain at the hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to carrying out her duties as chaplain, she

another living being.

What do these five women have in common, and why are they swimming upstream? Each is part of the Deaconess Community of the ELCA, a community of women who have served the Lutheran church in the United States since 1884. If you have ever met a deaconess (many of whom use the title *Sister*), you have likely seen how she, in her own quiet way, makes a difference in the life of the church as part of the ministry of Word and service, a ministry that dates back to the first century. In Romans 16:1, Paul refers to Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. The word he uses, *diakonon*, comes from *diakonos*, the same root of the word *deaconess*.



Sister Alma Kohlmann, (inset) was one of the first seven deaconesses to come to the U.S. from Germany in 1884. Sister Sally Kerr (left) works as a spiritual counselor with children in Plymouth Meeting, Pa.

COURAGEOUS BEGINNINGS

In 1884, seven deaconesses from Germany came to Philadelphia to revive the struggling German hospital and set up a school of nursing. It took extraordinary courage and commitment for those original seven to leave their homes and travel to a new country.

That spirit of commitment to Christ and the church has helped to shape the church we know today. The deaconess served where she was needed. Following a rigorous training program, each deaconess was assigned to a specific parish or institution. She received no salary for her service but was provided a place to live, shoes and clothing, and a small stipend for personal items.

A sister in the early days was humble in manner, yet fervent in her love of Christ and diligent in her work. She was strong and competent, a behind-the-scenes “mover and shaker.” Deaconesses founded hospitals, schools of nursing, social service agencies, and schools. Unencumbered by husband and family, a deaconess could move easily from one assignment to another.

Women who become deaconesses do not fit easily into any mold. Becoming a deaconess is not always a comfortable choice. Many older deaconesses angered or disappointed their families when they made the decision to enter the Community. Becoming a deaconess meant going against the norm of society

and remaining a single woman. Even today, nearly 30 years after the Community decided to allow deaconesses to marry, the decision to become a deaconess is often difficult. Working for God, as Sister Ramona Cecille puts it, doesn't mean we get to go into "all these easy places."

GROWTH AND CHANGE

Through the years, deaconesses have continuously redefined themselves and their roles to meet the challenges of a changing church. In 1970, the Lutheran Church in America (one of the predecessor bodies of the ELCA) began ordaining women, and the character and makeup of the Deaconess Community changed once more. Although a number of deaconesses chose to leave the Community to begin studying for the ordained ministry, the decision to ordain women strengthened the Community. It broadened women's choices for being in ministry.

Since its beginnings in the nineteenth century, the Deaconess Community has maintained a close relationship to the Lutheran church in the United States and Canada. Even today, a member of the Deaconess Community serves only under a call from one of the 65 synods of the ELCA or the five synods of the ELCIC. Deaconesses are trained church professionals who receive theological education in seminaries, along with those preparing to become pastors, associates in ministry, and diaconal ministers. The Deaconess Community works with each deaconess candidate to find the best ways to use her array of gifts in faithful service to the church.

In the early 1990s, the Deaconess Community began a re-visioning process that led to the decision to sell its property near Philadelphia and relocate to Chicago, the location of the churchwide offices of the ELCA. It was with mixed emotions that the Community locked the doors of the Deaconess Cen-

ter in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, in November 2002 and became a community in transition, centered not in a place but in its dedication to a ministry of Word and service.

One of the Community's first acts following the sale of its property was to vote affirmatively on a radical recommendation by its board of directors: to offer the gift of a tithe of the proceeds of the sale to the church. The first stage of the gift was accomplished when \$300,000 was distributed among a variety of ELCA-related programs, agencies, and institutions. This gift symbolizes deaconesses' strong ties to the ministry of the church at large. The Deaconess Community will make decisions about distributing the second portion of the tithe, approximately \$350,000, at its May 2004 assembly. One intent is to fund specific ministries, perhaps some that have been developed by deaconesses.

Although the exact shape of the Community is still in transition, one thing remains clear. The Deaconess Community is dedicated to equipping strong, independent women to "go where no one has gone before," forge new areas of mission, and care for all of God's people. Along with Sisters Annette, Melinda, Monica, Ramona, and Sally, the members of the Deaconess Community—past, present, and future—will continue to make a difference because, in the words of the apostle Paul, "the love of Christ urges us on" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Carol A. Burk has been a member of the Deaconess Community for over 22 years and has served as a Christian educator and an editor in the South and the Midwest. Under a special call from the ELCA's South Carolina Synod, she currently serves as publicist for St. Philip's Church (Episcopal) in Charleston, S.C. She is a member of St. Barnabas Lutheran Church, Charleston.



GRACE NOTES

New Hope for the Human Race

by Linda Post Bushkofsky

I WATCH MY 13-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER AND HER CIRCLE OF FRIENDS, REMEMBERING BACK TO MY OWN DAYS in junior high. The best of what adult women know as community and friendship often is in short supply in these early settings, as girls jockey for rank, position, and popularity. Even so, these young women are beginning to learn that being in community means sharing time and space with those who have similar concerns, values, interests, and beliefs.

My best experience of the community of women began with a housing questionnaire that brought together six college freshmen. We became such good friends that we lived together throughout our four years of college. Despite our different fields of study and varied interests, we formed a close community.

For nearly 15 years after graduation we were able to sustain ties by gathering at least twice a year. We've supported each other through six weddings, the death of four parents, the births and adoption of nine children, countless job changes and relocations, one divorce, and two major surgeries. We live in Illinois, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, New York, and Germany. Now we support each other primarily through e-mail, digital photos, phone calls, and the occasional visit. In a day when isolation and loneliness mark so many lives, my friends and I have found ways to support, strengthen, nurture, and sustain each other, despite the miles that separate us.

In her fascinating book *The Friendship of Women: A Spiritual Tradition*, Joan Chittister explores women's friendships by examining biblical women and their lives. Chittister observes that women's friendships

are marked by openness, possibility, support, empathy, personal experience, nurturance, acceptance, and intimacy. She concludes that "for women, relationships—presence to the other—are of the essence of existence, the answer to isolation, the very marrow of their meaning" (p. 36).

We women in the ELCA offer the church a special model of how to be in relationship with one another. "There is in women's friendships a different quality of presence," says Chittister. Unlike men, women "shape their relationships 'face-to-face,' in mutual dependence, in honest conversation, in exposures of personal weaknesses" (p. 36).

Chittister goes on to say that the bonding of women—which, for us, occurs in units of Women of the ELCA—is now "the breeding ground of a new kind of emotional life, personal development, recreation and even the transformation of public institutions." Women's friendships "are new hope for the human race," according to Chittister, "if we can only recognize them, if we can only bring them to life—respected, revered and invested with honor—in the world around us" (p. 57).

As Women of the ELCA we are called to mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. We will be true to that call when we embrace and live into the new hope for the human race that is grounded in mutual dependence, honest conversation, and exposures of personal weakness.

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director, Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

My Sisters, My Friends

by Catherine Malotky

SOMETIMES, GOD, I NEED YOU TO BE MY SISTER.

It is so much more common to think of you as father, brother, king, warrior. But there are times when I need from you what only a sister can give.

You have given me powerful, faithful sisters. They are bright and insightful, loving and strong. They know stories about me, and I know stories about them. We can laugh and remember. We can hear each other's perceptions about our life together in the past and the lives we are making now. They pray for me. They allow me to feel centered; they love me. Sometimes they challenge me.

You can do the same for me, precious God. You know the stories of my youth. You know the ways I have grown and struggled, and you love me still. You celebrate my victories and even dance with me in my prayers. You also weep with me when I am burdened by grief, when I have lost my way, when I yearn to be whole and hopeful. You call me to be my best, to think and act and serve.

You have given me your stories. They have been preserved by faithful tellers in the Scriptures I cherish. And if I listen, I hear you offering me new perspectives, helping me reflect on my life, through these stories. Only a divine voice could call the whole creation into being with a word! Only a loving sculptor would shape us from the dust of the ground. Only endless compassion would take on flesh and walk among us.

You are with me, Sister God, in the holy food you offer at your table. You do not expect me to live

on spirit only, but offer body and blood, bread and wine, to nourish and encourage me. You are here, in the flesh, when I need you.

And, dear God, you have surrounded me with sisters of your making. Such an imagination you have! You have given me sisters far beyond the ones who shared my mother's womb. You have given me sisters across the globe. Some are like me, with children like mine, with hopes and fears like mine, with futures like mine. Some are completely different. Some call me to risk and grow beyond what I ever imagined I could. Some are old and wise. Some are gone now, but their legacies live on in my life and in the world around me. Some are young, and they invite me to lean into the future with care and intention.

Such gifts these sisters are to me, loving God. Open me to their presence. Teach me to see your face and heart in them. Weave our lives together so that we might be the body of Christ, nudging and shaping the world to look the way you long for it to look. May we be partners in justice and mercy for all our sisters, certain of your love for each and for all. Amen.

Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as representative for North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.

READER CALL TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Mail or e-mail to *LWT* Editorial Office

May 2004

*Tell us about a friendship that has stood the test of time.
What have you learned from that friendship?*

Due January 15, 2004

June 2004

Tell us about a life-changing vacation.

Due February 16, 2004

July/August 2004

*What positive change have you made in your lifestyle?
What led you to make that change?*

Due March 15, 2004

IDEANET TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Mail the enclosed card or e-mail IdeaNet@elca.org

May 2004

*How does your women's group show God's love to people
who are not part of a congregation?*

Due January 15, 2004

June 2004

*Has your congregation or women's group sponsored a
mission trip? What worked well, and what would you
do differently next time?*

Due February 16, 2004

July/August 2004

*What earth-friendly initiatives does your congregation or
women's group participate in?*

Due March 15, 2004

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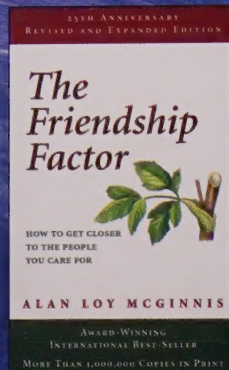
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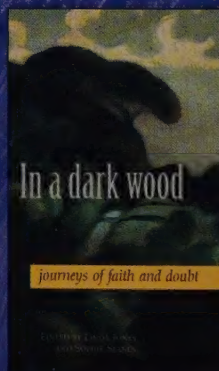
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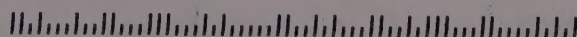
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